

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06  
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R 031348Z MAR 78  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6968  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1159

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1  
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, LE, SY  
SUBJECT: REMARKS BY ASIM QANSUH

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. IN CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR AND  
EMBOFFS MARCH 1, LOCAL BA'ATH PARTY LEADER ASIM QANSUH SAID  
LEBANON NEEDED TO FORM A POLITICAL CABINET AND TO REBUILD THE  
ARMY FROM THE GRUUND UP ON A NON-CONFESSIONAL BASIS. THE  
SYRIANS WERE UNLIKELY TO WITHDRAW THEIR FORCES AS LONG AS  
LEBANON HAD MAJOR SECURITY PROBLEMS AND NO NATIONAL ARMY TO  
DEAL WITH THEM. SYRIA FAVORED DANY CHAMOUN OR TONY  
FRANJIYAH TO REPLACE FUAD BOUTROS AS DEFENSE MINISTER. THE  
SYRIANS HAD NOT ALLOWED ANY MAJOR ARMS SHIPMENT THROUGH SYRIAN  
CONTROLLED TERRITORY TO THE PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON  
THIS YEAR. SYRIA AND THE U.S. HAD MANY COMMON INTERESTS AND  
SHOULD REMAIN FRIENDS. END SUMMARY.

2. ASIM QANSUH, THE REGIONAL SECRETARY OF THE BA'ATH PARTY  
OF SYRIA IN LEBANON, MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS AT LUNCH  
ON MARCH 1 WITH AMBASSADOR, MOLINEAUX AND YELLIN.

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3. LEBANON'S NEEDS.

A. QANSUH BELIEVED LEBANON HAD TWO PRIORITY NEEDS:

(1) THE FORMATION OF A POLITICAL CABINET AS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD  
NATIONAL ENTENTE, AND

(2) THE REBUILDING OF THE ARMY FROM THE GROUND UP ON A NON-CONFESSIONAL BASIS. THE POLITICAL CABINET WOULD HAVE TO COME BEFORE THE REBUILDING OF THE ARMY, WHICH WOULD TAKE YEARS TO ACCOMPLISH.

B. THE SYRIANS WERE UNLIKELY TO WITHDRAW THEIR FORCES AS LONG AS THERE WERE MAJOR SECURITY PROBLEMS IN LEBANON AND NO NATIONAL ARMY ABLE TO DEAL WITH THEM. SYRIA SIMPLY COULD NOT RISK A MAJOR POLITICAL UPHEAVAL WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN A HOSTILE LEBANON ON ITS BORDER, OR IN A PARTITION THAT WOULD HAVE A DESTABILIZING EFFECT IN SYRIA ITSELF.

4. NEW ARMY COMMANDER AND DEFENSE MINISTER.

A. THE SYRIANS BELIEVED THERE SHOULD BE A NEW DEFENSE MINISTER AND FAVORED TWO CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB: DANY CHAMOUN AND TONY FRANJIYAH. IN THE OPINION OF THE SYRIANS, ARMY COMMANDER VICTOR KHOURY WAS HOSTILE TO THEM AND SHOULD ALSO BE REPLACED.

B. DANY CHAMOUN HAD BEEN COOPERATIVE, INDEED "TOO COOPERATIVE" WITH THE SYRIANS. HE HAD TURNED OVER SIX PEOPLE, NOT THREE AS REPORTED IN THE PRESS, SUPPOSEDLY INVOLVED IN THE KILLING OF TWO SYRIAN SOLDIERS IN FURN ASH-SHUBBAK ON FEBRUARY 15. DANY HAD DONE THIS SIMPLY AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL TO THE SYRIANS, BUT THESE SIX PEOPLE WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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PROBABLY NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLINGS.

5. THE PALESTINIANS.

A. THE SYRIANS HAD NOT ALLOWED ANY MAJOR ARMS SHIPMENT TO THE PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON THIS YEAR THROUGH SYRIAN CONTROLLED TERRITORY. THE SYRIANS HAD SENT 800 MORTAR ROUNDS TO THE PALESTINIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON LAST MONTH AND NOTHING ELSE, DESPITE REPEATED REQUESTS FOR VARIOUS SUPPLIES BY YASIR ARAFAT. IN ANY EVENT, THE PALESTINIANS ALREADY HAD MORE THAN ENOUGH WEAPONS, ALTHOUGH THEY OCCASIONALLY NEEDED AMMUNITION RESUPPLIES.

B. SYRIA REGARDED SALAH KHALAF (ABU IYAD) AS ITS MAN IN THE PLO AND VIEWED YASIR ARAFAT AS UNTRUSTWORTHY. NEVER- THE LESS, SYRIA WOULD BE UNABLE TO UNDERMINE ARAFAT'S POSITION. FIRST, KHALAF HAD A MUCH MORE LIMITED MENTALITY AND PERSPECTIVE THAN ARAFAT. SECOND, ARAFAT ENJOYED IMPORTANT POLITICAL SUPPORT WITHIN THE PLO. ALMOST ALL PALESTINIAN DIPLOMATS WERE MEMBERS OF FATAH, FOR EXAMPLE. THE PLO HAD AGREED THAT IF A GOVERNMENT IN EXILE WERE FORMED, SAIQA COULD HAVE THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, BUT FATAH WOULD HAVE

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, QANSUH SAID.

6. RELATIONS WITH THE U.S.

A. NOTING THAT HE WAS LEAVING IMMEDIATELY AFTER LUNCH TO MEET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM IN DAMASCUS, QANSUY MADE A STRONG PLEA FOR SYRIAN-AMERICAN COOPERATION. HE WAS CONVINCED SADAT'S INITIATIVE WOULD FAIL. HE BELIEVED THAT SYRIA AND THE UNITED STATES HAD MANY COMMON INTERESTS, INCLUDING SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT SARKIS, STABILITY IN LEBANON, AND A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT THAT WOULD BE CONCLUDED AT GENEVA ON THE BASIS OF U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338.

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B. THE AMBASSADOR REPLIED THAT WE CERTAINLY HOPED TO CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND TO COOPERATE WITH THE SYRIANS IN MAINTAINING PEACE AND STABILITY HERE. HE ASKED QANSUH TO TELL KHADDAM THAT THE UNITED STATES, LIKE SYRIA, WAS FIRMLY OPPOSED TO PARTITION AND WAS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING PRESIDENT SARKIS AND THE SOVEREIGNTY, UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF LEBANON.  
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## Message Attributes

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